

THE PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL ANTIQUITIES.

"For Time hath not rebuked them, but spread'd
Barbaric dwellings on their shattered site."

THE study of mediæval art has increased throughout Europe so much during late years, that there is reason to hope, with the vigorous efforts of societies and individuals, we may be one day spared the wanton destruction of national monuments, such as now too often occurs. The antiquarian world has expanded and extended its influence; no longer confined to the mere acquiring possession of the old and singular, it rightly estimates the value of its researches, as capable of influencing the future and the present, unfolding the preceptive truths of history, and resulting in an increased admiration of the beautiful and the good. For as the general tendency of man is towards the intellectual and the virtuous, and as his mental efforts are not forwarded by the continued existence of doubt and uncertainty, it seems that the gradual removal of the veil of ages must be attended with advantages, highly conducive to his moral and mental well-being. Let it, therefore, be understood that the antiquary repudiates the unphilosophical pursuit which has no outlet from the pleasure of possession; he claims for the result of his researches into the condition of the past, that standing as a science, which an age distinctively marked for its consideration of the future has already awarded. Now, associations are formed for the preservation of architectural remains, and money is readily subscribed for the re-edifying of fabrics. Still, though we have gained much, it is only the intelligent half of men who are thoroughly awake to the value of such national memorials; the other portion remain enveloped in a sleep, from which our present efforts are not able to awake them. The false economy which allows no consideration to prevent the destruction, for some immediate end, of an antiquarian relic, is still in full influence, whilst buildings are patched up with insufficient materials, or are entirely left to the inroads of the wind and weather, from which a very small annual outlay would have preserved them. We will not speak of the restoring of Henry the Seventh's Chapel with crumbling stone, or the west front of Litchfield Cathedral with cement, because those were not things of our day; but what interesting fabrics have we allowed to disappear, and what destruction still goes on, almost unwitnessed, amongst the village and parish churches of England. The senseless demolition, too, of the nave of St. Saviour's, Southwark, is a thing of yesterday, and for which disgrace must always attach to us, and the inhabitants of the parish, in whose hands it more immediately was. Had a Burlington lived, and been imbued with the love of Gothic architecture, he would have transported the very stones of St. Katherine's Tower Hill, to some more secure resting place for re-erection.* The buildings destroyed without reason, some of which may be seen in the works of Carter, and in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, would stock a kingdom. The spires of Lincoln entirely taken away, the Lady Chapel at St. Alban's separated from the church and converted into a school-room, the destruction not many years since of a beautiful chapel on the south side of the Temple Church, and the injury done to the tombs at Westminster at coronations, are instances of what has been allowed to go on unnoticed, and uncareed for. There is hardly a church, that does not contain paintings and panels from the rood-screen, inserted in the modern pewing. The interesting half-timbered houses of the northern and midland counties are lessening in number every year, encaustic tiles and monumental brasses are stolen, and stained glass left to drop out, for want of a shilling's worth of repairs; whilst many of

our churches, as in the case of Old Fairlight Church, are menaced with instant destruction. Ely Chapel, Austin Friars Church, and nearly all the Gothic churches remaining in the city of London, are in a rapid state of decay, or crowded with modern excrescences: the crypt of the first mentioned was a short time since occupied by a cooper. In another style of architecture, we have to lament the complete destruction of Wansted-house and Carlton-house; the former, one of the most beautiful examples of Italian architecture in England, and the portico of the latter, a principal ornament of the metropolis. The pedestal of the statue at Charing Cross, of every beautiful design, is now beyond reach of restoration. We trust that when the remaining portion of the old Treasury in Whitehall is pulled down, the doorway will be preserved, and re-erected in one of the parks, or in some other locality. Such antiquities have often been left to stock the yard of a dealer in old materials, when their value as examples should have preserved them.

The aid afforded to the student of heraldry and costume by stained glass and monumental brasses, should induce their careful preservation, and cases have occurred in which the title to considerable property has been determined by their evidence; but, for want of the timely driving in of a couple of nails, a brass frequently becomes detached from the pavement, which is almost always followed by its entire disappearance. The same may be said of stained glass, with this addition, that the rather greater value set upon it has, in order to get one complete window, often led to the union of portions of different design in a manner most puzzling to the antiquary.

The traceried windows in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey are in such a state of decay, that it will shortly be impossible to restore them accurately; and the iron-work round the tombs, which all who have seen it agree in considering of great value, is not to be met with.† The fact that our modern metal-work is deficient in that freedom of design which appears in old specimens of the middle ages, and even down to a period as late as the commencement of the last century, is evident, and has been sufficiently set forth in previous numbers of this paper. (*ante* p. 97 and p. 102). At Hampton-court, and in the neighbourhood of the older squares, portions are remaining, worked by hand, more beautiful than any amongst the miles of spears and javelins cast by the modern mechanic. If all the old railings from the abbey have not been long since melted down into such weapons, why, we would ask, are they not immediately replaced? But there is great difficulty in getting at the truth; nobody seems to know if any, or what railings are in existence. The imperfect restoration of the screen, by Quentio Matsys, in St. George's Chapel, has been commented upon in *THE BUILDER* (p. 97 *ante*), and no circumstance could so well shew the slight value set upon works of art, by those who unfortunately have the control of them. In all instances of restoration, every line and mark of the original should be copied, with no deviation whatever; non-existing portions should be replaced with work produced in the spirit of the original, and limited from coeval examples; one step short of this, and we would rather see the hand of Time work its own course, than that a delusion on the beholder should usurp the place of the beautiful work so falsified and destroyed. An architect well-versed in the particular style should be consulted in every step; he must not be a designing man, but must make originality subservient to exact reproduction. The greatest destruction goes on "reimite from town," where a village churchwarden is the arbiter *elegerium*. The nearest mason is the only other person whose opinion is thought of. Thus battlement gives place to plain coping, and cusps and window-tracery to plain mullion and transom, till, little by little, every feature of the old building is annihilated. The best restoration is scarcely so valuable as the original,

though time-worn and despoiled: the former, though perhaps beautiful as a work of art, is comparatively valueless as an authority; while, if the preservation of the fabric be diligently attended to, the decay is seldom sufficiently rapid and complete to obliterate the old features from those who are qualified to examine. Not that we would be inferred to say, that restoration is never desirable; but looking at the mischief perpetrated by unskilful meddlers, and at the fact, that in so many cases the progress of decay might, with proper attention, have been arrested at the outset at a nominal expense, we do say, that any work having the character of an original document, and valuable accordingly, should not be interfered with in the slightest measure, until the very last moment, and then should be treated with extreme care by properly qualified persons. Many accomplished men, who were ranked as Gothic architects only ten years ago, would now be ready to confess they had been comparatively ill-fitted for a work of restoration, and when we think how much progress we are making in the knowledge of Gothic architecture, through the aid of system in the study of it, we must say, that we are all only learners in a style, which, perhaps, presents more "matter to be learned" than any that has ever prevailed. Who would not rather that all the fury of the elements had been exerted against our cathedrals, than that they should have been submitted to the hand of one James Wyatt? On such grounds we are inclined to deprecate the talked-of restoration of Caernarvon Castle, now an edifice unrivalled in interest, and in an excellent state of repair, compared with many cathedrals and churches, not so generally styled ruins. For every antiquarian purpose, the existing portion amply suffices, and we trust, that any extensive scheme of restoration will be carefully considered, or confined to the renewing of such parts as may absolutely require it. From what we have observed, at some of our churches, where the new portions are generally thought quite equal to the old, we fear that the original ornament is often greatly departed from. In such cases, either the ornament is pared down for a new surface, thus becoming at least smaller, or, a new stone being inserted, the mason works without cast or drawing, and can only consult any other portion of similar design, which there may happen to be at some distance. Of course this can hardly take place where an able architect is consulted, but the greater number of repairs are executed without his advice.

Churches are covered with stucco, and mouldings mended with cement; oak is replaced with deal; and whitewashing, whether of the exterior or the interior, of the masonry, the ceiling, the rood-screen, or the font, is an annual occurrence. The restoration of York Cathedral is rather an exception to the general fate of our antiquities, than an evidence against any thing we have said. The feeling, almost amounting to affection, which every Yorkshireman has for that matchless pile, has nothing comparable with it in other parts of the kingdom. The new Houses of Parliament, though a great work for this or any age, does not reconcile us to the destruction of St. Stephen's Chapel, which might have been restored to form a portion of the new buildings. To the antiquary, and the lover of the beautiful in art, there can be no more melancholy reflection than that "improvement" and destruction march with equal steps; one by one the most admired relics of former days are annihilated, and often under the very eye of the educated and the refined. Bit by bit our national monuments are altered and destroyed, and the change is not perceived till the mischief is irremediable. Thus, we find that the beautiful cloisters of St. Stephen's Chapel are not to be preserved in their original state, as it has been reported, but are to be intersected by walls, and divided into separate rooms, for the purposes of the legislature. We should be happy to find ourselves in error, but an inspection of the plan is too convincing of the intention. The fragments of St. Stephen's Chapel should be preserved, and freely open to inspection.

But to free the original fabric from accumulated excrescences can by no means be

* Parts of these two churches are illustrated in Pugin's "Specimens of Gothic Architecture," and in the "Gothic Ornaments." Part of the pulpit, some stall-work, and a tomb in the new church in the Regent's Park, were removed from the old building.

† The gate designed by Inigo Jones, which Burlington rebuilt, having purchased the materials, is still remaining in Chiswick Gardens, where we last year saw it inscribed with a record of its history. Its removal occasioned the following lines by Pope:—

"O, GATE, how comest thou here?
Gone,—I was brought from Chelsea last year,
Batter'd with wind and weather;
Inigo Jones put me together.
Sir Hans Sloane
Let me alone,—
Burlington brought me hither."

† Vide Report of Select Committee on National Monuments and Works of Art, June, 1841, in which is most important evidence as to the state of this building, and the preservation of national monuments generally. It was stated that some of the more beautiful portions were then in the possession of the person who first purchased them. No exertion should be spared to recover them. If any where in existence. The grave-stones, which were also removed, should be carefully preserved. They are said to have elegant devices carved upon them.

* It is to be hoped that the improvements in the neighbourhood of Westminster Abbey will not interfere with the old coeval buildings.